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## Positive Action

The Positive Action (PA) program is an integrated, comprehensive, and coherent program that has been shown to improve the academic achievement and multiple behaviors of children and adolescents (5 to 18 years old) and their parents and teachers. It is intensive, with lessons at each grade level (kindergarten to 12th) that are reinforced all day by including school, family, and community components, which work together or can stand alone.

For **students**, Positive Action improves:

- Individual self-concept
- Academic achievement and learning skills
- Decisionmaking, problem-solving, and social/interpersonal skills
- Physical and mental health
- Behavior, character, and responsibility

PA improves **school climate**, attendance, achievement scores, disciplinary referrals/suspensions, parent and community involvement, services for special-need and high-risk students, efficiency, and effectiveness. PA positively affects instruction and classroom/school management skills of **school personnel** through improved self-concept, professionalism, and interpersonal/social skills and, in turn, has a positive impact on their personal lives.

Finally, PA helps **families** by improving parent-child relations and overall family attitudes toward and involvement in school and the community.



*Effective Substance Abuse and  
Mental Health Programs  
for Every Community*

## Proven Results

- Violence and substance use reduced 26% to 56%
- Academic achievement improved 12% to 65%
- General discipline improved by 23% to 90%
- Absenteeism decreased between 6% and 45%
- Truancy decreased by 14% to 20%
- Suspensions reduced 8% to 81%
- Self-concept improved up to 43%

## INTERVENTION

Universal

Selective

Indicated



**U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES**  
Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration  
Center for Substance Abuse Prevention  
[www.samhsa.gov](http://www.samhsa.gov)

## OUTCOMES

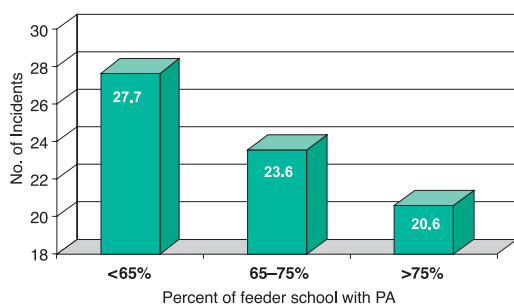
Data from a study that used a matched case-control design found that, compared to the control group, a large Nevada school district that used PA:

- Reported 85% fewer violent incidents per 1,000 students
- Scored 16% higher in their fourth grade achievement scores

Similar matched case-control data from Hawaii found that, compared to a control group, PA schools reported:

- 52% better SAT scores
- 76% fewer disciplinary problems
- 7.5% lower daily absenteeism

Effects of Positive Action feeder\* schools on middle school substance-related incidents



In a large Florida school district, middle schools with a high percentage of students coming from PA elementary schools reported:

- 15% fewer incidents of substance abuse (see figure)
- 20% more students scoring above the median on standardized eighth grade reading and math tests
- 21% fewer violence-related incidents
- 8% fewer suspensions from school, with the effects being larger for high-minority schools

Overall, there was a strong dose-response relationship, with stronger effects occurring in middle schools that had greater numbers graduate from PA grade schools.

## TARGET POPULATION

PA involves all members of a school community: students, faculty, support staff, administrators, student family members, and people who live in the community surrounding the school. It is effective in urban, suburban, and rural areas and with all ethnic and cultural groups as well as with special-needs students.

PA is primarily implemented in grades K to 12, in before- and after-school programs, within Evenstart and Head Start programs, and during extracurricular, family, and community activities. It may be implemented in whatever environment best suits the intervention including social service agencies, businesses, criminal justice agencies, faith institutions, and mental health service agencies.

## BENEFITS

- Develops healthy, self-motivated children who avoid harmful behaviors and substances
- Develops educators who are professional, caring, and competent
- Develops parents who are involved with their children's education and school, and who teach and reinforce program goals at home
- Offers students a quality after-school program
- Motivates community activists to link their community groups to local schools

## HOW IT WORKS

Ideally, a PA school implements the program schoolwide and reinforces positive actions throughout the day. The principal, a PA Coordinator, and PA Committee guide the program. Classroom teachers teach the curriculum, using a grade-appropriate kit containing prepared materials and a manual with lesson plans. Counselor and special education materials are included.

Parents receive a *Family Kit* that contains lessons and materials that correlate to the school program and supports parenting classes. The *Community Kit* is used to organize a steering committee that guides community partners to develop and coordinate positive community initiatives and activities.

PA offers an implementation plan, with an interactive Web site, to achieve implementation fidelity, and a program evaluation plan that schools are strongly encouraged to use.

## IMPLEMENTATION ESSENTIALS

First and foremost, the PA program requires willing faculty, administrative staff, parents, community members, and, most important, a principal who will provide primary leadership. Key staff includes:

- **Positive Action Committee**—This group is composed of a teacher from every grade level, the principal or designee, a support staff representative, several parents, community members, and students. They oversee program implementation.
- **Positive Action Coordinator**—This person may be the principal or designee and is responsible for coordinating the Positive Action Committee and monitors day-to-day program activities.
- **Parent Coordinator**—A member of the Positive Action Committee, this individual provides information to parents and assists with parenting classes.
- **Community Coordinator**—Coordinates the community steering committee and plans activities.

## Training and Materials

Schools implementing the PA program will need a *Principal's Kit* for the school-climate program; a grade-level *Teacher's Kit* for each classroom, special education class, and after-school program; a *Counselor's Kit*; *Family Kits* for parents; a *Community Kit*; and an implementation plan. The Parent and Positive Action Coordinators, adult members of the Coordinating Committee, and all teachers should participate in .5 to 2 days of training. One trainer can train 50 people. Schools need not implement all program components, as each can stand alone.

## PROGRAM BACKGROUND

PA was developed in Twin Falls, ID, between 1974 and 1982, at which time the Positive Action Company was founded. The program has been used in more than 7,000 schools nationally and internationally. Development and refinement of the program are ongoing.

PA is based on the intuitive philosophy that “you feel good about yourself when you do positive things.” The program aligns schools, parents, and communities in promoting specific positive actions for youth that affect them physically, intellectually, socially, and emotionally.

## Target Areas

### Protective Factors To Increase

#### Individual

- Positive personal characteristics (e.g., cooperation, self-concept, self-discipline, motivation to succeed)
- Healthy ethical, social, and emotional development
- Social skills (e.g., communication, problem solving, conflict resolution, positive empathy)
- Positive bonding to social institutions and values, including school
- Commitment to prosocial values

#### Family

- Bonding and attachment with parents and siblings
- Positive parenting (e.g., avoiding use of criticism, modeling and reinforcing positive behavior and accomplishment)
- Emotionally supportive family (e.g., knowledge of child's friends and their parents, involvement in homework and school activities)
- Frequent positive communication

#### Peer

- Association with peers who are involved in school
- Association with peers who engage in positive behaviors

#### School

- Caring and supportive teachers, staff, and school climate
- Environment reinforces positive behavior
- Teacher warmth and positive role modeling

#### Community

- Student, parent, and school involvement with community

### Risk Factors To Decrease

#### Individual

- Inadequate self-concept, confidence, or social skills
- Problem or unhealthy behaviors
- Susceptibility to peer pressure

#### Family

- Family disorganization and conflict
- Lack of involvement

#### Peer

- Delinquent peers

#### School

- Disorganized, chaotic, lax, or inconsistent rules
- Lack of teacher warmth, positive role modeling, and reinforcement

#### Community

- Community disorganization
- Easy availability of drugs

## EVALUATION DESIGN

From the 1970s through 2001, PA has been researched and evaluated in a wide variety of schools (with high and low minority representation, mobility rates, and/or levels of poverty) by the program's developer, various school districts, and independent evaluators.

Evaluations have used experimental-control group, national comparison group (e.g., evaluating changes in percentile rankings), matched control, pre- and post-case studies, and comparison group study designs.

Data from various comparison group designs involving more than 100 elementary schools that used PA demonstrate the program's consistent positive effects on student behavior (i.e., discipline, suspensions, crime, violence, drug use), performance (i.e., attendance, achievement), and self-concept. Results were often better in more disadvantaged schools.

## PROGRAM DEVELOPER

### **Carol Gerber Allred, Ph.D.**

Dr. Carol Gerber Allred was an English and Psychology teacher at Twin Falls High School (Idaho) when she developed the first version of the Positive Action Program. In 1977, she moved to an elementary school to develop the elementary component. The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, U.S. Department of Justice, and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, provided 5 years of funding for the development and multiple independent evaluations of the program. In 1982, Dr. Allred founded the Positive Action Company (now Positive Action, Inc.) and has continued to develop and expand the program.

## CONTACT INFORMATION

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## RECOGNITION

Model Program—Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

Promising Program—U.S. Department of Education

Model Program—U.S. Department of Education, Title I Comprehensive School Reform

Promising Practices—Education Commission of the States for Comprehensive School Reform

Governor's Award—Idaho Exemplary Substance Abuse Programs